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ABSTRACT

The changing role of Japanese women can be seen in the stages of a domestic labor debate which occurred at three different times in the past 30 years. The first debate began with Ayako Ishigaki's (1955) insistence that women should have a job outside the home. Wartime production helped break down traditional divisions of labor by encouraging women to work in gun factories. Such "pull" factors (those which pull women to the work force) also encouraged women to assist in rebuilding Japan's post-war economy. In addition, five "push" factors (factors which push women out of the home) also accounted for the increase of women in the work force: (1) technical innovation of homelife, (2) industrialization of domestic labor, (3) increase in the nuclear family, (4) desire for a higher standard of living, and (5) changes in women's consciousness. However, the economic depression of 1955 caused these pull factors to disappear and male dominance was reestablished. The second debate, initiated by Fujiko Isono during Japan's period of high economic growth (1960's) provided an economic rationale for placing monetary value on a wife's domestic labor. While part-time jobs provided a temporary compromise, a third debate, initiated by Kyoko Takeda (1971), argued that being a part-time housewife is not a wise strategy for women's liberation because having dual roles merely results in exploitation both inside and outside the home. Today, however, most Japanese women have opted for a dual-role, "two-cycle" life pattern and strive for a balance between work and home. (LH)

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# THE JAPANESE DOMESTIC LABOR DEBATE

Paper presented for NWSA'83 at OSU at Ohio in June, 1983.

ANTHROPOLOGY

BY

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# CHAPTER I

## Introduction

The debate on the housewives and their house-keeping labor took place three times at the different stages in the post-war history of Japan. It reflected the changing role of women as well as the changing image of housewives. The main argument was focused on the question whether a housewife should work or stay at home. The answer seems to be obvious today, but still not simple. The debate involved a great number of participants such as sociologists, economists, anthropologists, home economists, social critics and just housewives themselves, and it excelled in its exhaustiveness where we find all the potential argument we can imagine on this issue. This debate was also remarkable because it took place as early as 1955 . The United States and Britain had a similar kind of the domestic labor debate twenty years later.

## The first debate

The first domestic labor debate began with Ayako Ishigaki's polemic paper entitled 'Housewife as a side-job' in 1955, ten years after the World War II. She was a challeng-

ing initiator of this debate. She insisted that a married woman should have a job outside the home, because housekeeping is no longer a full-time job for a woman. Her statement challenged the stereotypical image of the housewife, and caused a great reaction among the conservatives, and stimulated much discussion.

In order to understand the debate, it is necessary to have a brief knowledge about the socio-economical background what the year 1955 was like. I will argue along with two different factors which enabled housewives to work outside, and thereby served as a basis of the first debate, that is, the pull factors and the push factors. The pull factors are those which pull them to the labor market, and the push factors those which push them out of home.

To begin with, there were perpetually pull factors in the post-war labor market which encouraged women to work outside, because the Japanese economy was sufferering from a shortage of labor. It started during the war-time when most male workers went to war. Ironically, the war-time was an age of liberation for women, because it broke down the traditional sex division of labor. Women were encouraged to work at factories, producing guns, planes, machines, which used to be men's work. Such experiences gave them a sense of power, and they became aware they were capable of doing the same work that men do, when they are allowed to do so.

In 1945, the war ended, and soldiers came home. Women agreed to going back home as housewives. Sex division of labor was reestalished, when the peace was restored. It was a mystery why those self-confident women were so easily persuaded to go back home. which is more likely the case with the American women than the Japanese women. There is a definite difference between them, for the American men came back home as victors, while the Japanese men as losers. War is not only a political and material battle, but also an ethical and ideological conflict between nations. When the Japanese men were defeated in the war, they also lost their authority over their women. They were powerless and depressed, and on their behalf, women had to work to support themselves and their families. In addition, employers could not afford to keep their preference for male workers. Through and after the war, working women, especially working houswives became no longer exceptional. Before the war, women employees were limited to single women such as unmarried, divorced or widowed, who were obliged to support themselves, and it was common for women workers to leave their jobs when they got married. However, the Japanese labor market demanded women's labor in the stage of economic recovery from the damage of the war-time. Above all, the Korean war which started in 1950 provided Japan with a great amount of special demand by the U.S. army, which contributed a lot to the Japanese economic recovery. In 1955, Japan reached one of the peaks of its economic prosperity.

The first domestic labor debate took place in this historical background. It was focused on the question whether or not a housewife should work outside, which used to be incompatible, because until this time, women could either be married or work outside. But women came to have the third option; she can be both a housewife and worker.

Among the push factors, five could be pointed out which push housewives out of home. The first one is the technological innovation of home life, that is, the revolution of energy from coal and wood to gas and electricity. The home electric appliances such as refrigerators, vacuum cleaners and washing machines were rapidly diffused and housekeeping was no longer a full-time job for a healthy, adult woman.

The second factor is the industrialization of domestic labor which replaced a great part of housework with manufactured products. We could get precooked food, fast food and even dine out, if we wanted, and the domain of domestic labor was shrinking.

The third factor is the increase of nuclear families which consist of parents and only two children. In 1960's, the average number of a household members fell down from five to less than four. With such a small family, a housewife has no more a heavy load as before. In a traditional extended family, a housewife had an important role of responsibility for the big household, and not every woman could reach this honorable status. Through the nuclearization of families, every woman can become a housewife when

married, but her status is much less important and responsible than before.

The fourth factor is the material desire for a comfortable and convenient life of the middle-class standard. The greatest reason for housewives to decide to work outside is always to earn money, which is necessary for the betterment of life. They worked outside so as to purchase the electric appliances, which in turn, enabled them to work outside. The averege woman's wage was too small to support herself alone, but double income of a family became necessary to maintain the middle-class standard of life.

The fifth and final factor is of course the change of women's consciousness, especially through high education in the egalitarian climate after the war. The coeducational school system encouraged both boys and girls to reach a higher education, so long as they stayed at school, but girls had to come across the discriminating business world out of school.

To sum up, these five push factors as well as the pull factors worked together to drive women out of home, and home was no longer a place for an adult woman to stay all day long.

However, the socio-economical climate changed after 1955, when the Korean war ended and the serious economic depression began. Though the push factors still existed, the pull factors in the labor market disappeared. By this

stage, Japan had reached the economic recovery and reorganized itself. Through this process, the Japanese society reestablished male dominance both inside and outside the family. Outside, many companies began to close their doors to women workers, while, inside, women became economically dependent on their husbands, and thereby the modern industrial type of sex division of labor in urban nuclear families was widely established, which serves essential reason for the women liberation movements in highly industrial societies. There is no wonder why the women's liberation movements first took place among those in such highly developped countries as the West and Japan, for women in those societies have sufficient reason to liberate themselves from this modern version of sex role assignment.

## The second debate

The second debate took place in the beginning of 1960's, when Japan experienced the miracle of so-called High Economic Growth. The major issue was the demand of wages for domestic labor by housewives. The initiator of the second debate, Fujiko Isono, a feminist economist, insisted that if a husband contributed to the Gross National Products through his labor and a wife contributed to the reproduction of his labor, her domestic labor should be included into the GNP and therefore should be paid. Tamae Mizuta, a young challenging feminist Marxist, followed Isono, proposing the

idea of an allowance for housewives by the government. But the economints' responce to them, especially the Marxist economists', were poor and dogmatic. They just laughed at their ignorance of Marx's theory of labor value, only repeating the dogmatic statement that domestic labor should not be considered a productive labor and should not be paid.

Of course, there are several theoretical difficulties in their arguments. If a housewife should be paid, who will pay her? Her husband? His employer? Her ex-employer? Or the government? If the husband pays her, he will have a zero-sum conflict with her in sharing the same pie with a limited funds. Moreover, most husbands can not earn enough money to pay her for all her housekeeping activities. If a husband's employer is responsible for payment, why should he pay more money to a married worker who has the same contribution as an unmarried worker? If a wife's ex-employer pays, he will tend to avoid employing women workers. In the case of the government, why should women workers pay tax to support housewives? And so forth. If a housewife is paid, every woman is willing to become a housewife, which results in the reinforcement of the sex division of labor. Also, what should we think of the extra housework done by a working housewife? Why should only domestic labor done by a full-time housewife be paid?

Britain and the United States had a similar domestic labor debate about the wage for housework in 1970's, ten

years later than the Japanese case. Marxist feminists began to challenge the dogmatic interpretation of Marxian theory on domestic labor, and did not hesitate to revise Marx's original text, and thus transgress the sanctuary of traditional Marxism. The debate is still ongoing and we have not reached the consensus, yet a great deal of fruit has been brought by Marxist feminism.

Througout the 1960's of the High Economic Growth, a modern type of sex division of labor in the urban nuclear family between a workaholic husband and a full-time housewife whose task is mainly taking care of her husband and children was established, while simultaneously, the Japanese labor market, suffering from a shortage of labor, introduced quite an innovative type of working style for women, that is, part-time jobs. I would call it an innovative compromise between capitalism and patriarchy, for, as a part-time worker, a woman can work outside keeping her identity as a housewife, and capitalism does not have to worry about destroying the male-dominant family structure. This great device solves the role conflict for a woman between a worker and a housewife, and on the contrary, a woman wants to work outside so as to fulfill her role as mother and wife by providing the home with convenience and comfort which she can afford by her additional income.

Now, full-time housewives became transformed into part-time housewives. Through this change, women came to have

the 'dual roles' of a housekeeper and a wage laborer, and both of them are part-time jobs. A working housewife, which used to sound contradictory, became no longer exceptional, and a full-time housewife came to call herself 'just a housewife', shaming herself. The image as well as identity of a housewife was getting challenged.

## The third debate

It was against such a background that the third debate took place. The initiating argument by Kyoko Takeda in 1971 was epoch-making, insisting that it was only housewives who are liberated, because they are provided with a great social resourse of leisure time for self-realization which could be afforded neither to their businessmen husbands nor to the working women. Such a social resource as time is not mesurable in terms of money, and could be distributed equally only after the ultimate communist revolution. Takeda's argument tried to justify the existence of the full-time housewives, which reflected the uncertainty of the housewives' identity.

Nevertheless, her argument contained a remarkable point which should not be negligible. She pointed out that being a part-time housewife is not a wise strategy for womens' liberation, because having 'dual roles' ends up in expoitation both inside and outside the home. She stressed the importance of the home as a shelter from the capitalist

exploitation, a position that reflected the counter-culture movements in early 1970's which turned their back against materialistic values. It is illusory to take the home as a shelter of capitalist exploitation, because nothing can get rid of capitalist system in which housewives are no exceptions, contribute to as well as are exploited by capitalists, yet her argument contains a partial truth.

Today, most women have come to take the 'dual roles' of a part-time housewife and part-time worker, and choose the so-called 'two-cycle' life pattern, that is, a combination of working before marriage or pregnancy and re-entering the job market after the child-rearing life stage. Women are encouraged to have this 'two cycle' pattern by the Japanese government, and this has become the preferred option among young women. However, I always try to warn them not to be deceived their male dominant government, because the 'two cycle' pattern, i.e., dual roles distributed to different life stages is of convenience not for women, but for men. On the one hand, inside the home, a husband can appreciate woman's housework as a part-time housewife, and on the other hand, outside the home as an employer, a man can exploit woman's cheap, obedient labor as a part-time worker. Above all, it is men themselves who can enjoy middle-class standard of life with the financial support by their wives, without threatening their male dominance. This is a trap for women.

## Conclusion

Then, there still remains the original question: should housewives work outside, minimizing housekeeping labor, and therefore compete with men for the share of the pie in the job market? Natalie Sokoloff, a leading Marxist feminist, the author of 'Between Money and Love: Dialectic Relations Between Home and Market Work' deals with the same problem. In her book, she also points out the dangerous trap of 'dual roles' for women, yet she rejected the simple solution of working outside as well. A private family life, no matter what form it would be, is something which market principle should not allowed to invade. The boundary between market and home should be maintained. If it is men who have neglected the value of home, then, it is women's turn that reevaluate its place properly. Balancing of work and home, or borrowing Sokoloff's words, a 'dialectic relations between market and home' should become the most important task not only for women but also for men.

APPENDIX: Historical backgroud

1945-1950 Economic recovery in post-war time
1950-1955 Special demand by the U.S. army in Korean war
1955-1960 Economic depression
1096-1970 High economic growth
1970-1980 Oil schock and stagflation

1980- Stable growth

## THE JAPANESE DOMESTIC LABOR DEBATE

* (f) and (m) indicate the sex of the author.

I The first debate

Ayako Ishigaki(f), Housewife as a side job, Fujin Koron, Feb. 1955.

Shiho Sakanishi(f), A criticism to 'Housewife as a side job', Fujin Koron, June 1955.

Keiko Shimizu(f), The rise of the age of housewives, Fujin Koron, June 1955.

Chitose Shimazu(f), Housekeeping is not a woman's vocation, Fujin Koron, June 1955.

Tsuneari Fukuda(m), The misleading women's liberation, Fujin Koron, July 1955.

A. Ishigaki(f), What prevents women from liberation, Fujin Koron, Aug. 1955.

Raicho Hiratsuka(f), The liberation of housewives, Fujin Koron, Dec. 1955.

Sumiko Tanaka(f), The housewife debate in comparison with the American case, Fujin Koron, Dec. 1955.

Hisao Sekijima(m), A housewife should be self-confident as a home manager, Fujin Koron, Sep. 1956.

Nobuyuki Okuma(m), Family and economics, Fujin Koron, Oct. 1956.

Tadao Umesao(m), Women and civilization, Fujin Koron, May 1957.

N. Okuma(m), The thought of housewives, Fujin Koron, July 1957.

Eikan Kyu(m), The sex division of labor between a husband and a wife, Fujin Koron, Oct. 1957.

Hideko Maruoka(f), Cooperation between a husband and a wife, Fujin Koron, Oct. 1957.

Shigeto Tsurumi(m), Contemporary housewives, Fujin Koron, May 1959.

T. Umesao(m), Housewives become useless, Fujin Koron June 1959.

T. Umesao(m), Mothers are almighty, Fujin Koron, Sep. 1959.

II The second debate

Fujiko Isono(f), The confusions in women's libaration, Asahi Journal, April 10, 1960.

Tamae Mizuta(f), The price of housewives' labor, Asahi Journal, Sep. 25, 1960.

Taeko Watanabe(f), Women workers, mothers and housewives, Gakushu-no-tomo, Oct. 1960.

Yoshio Hatakeyama(m), Housewife as a housekeeping manager, Fujin Koron, Oct. 1960.

Tokuo Takagi(m), Working women and housewives, Shiso, Dec. 1960.

F. Isono(f), Again on housewives' labor, Shiso-no-kagaku, Feb. 1961.

Akiko Mori(f), Labor value theory and housewives' labor, Asahi Journal, April 9, 1961.

Teruko Wada(f), Escape from being a housewife, Asahi Journal, April 9, 1961.

III The third debate

Kyoko Takeda(f), It is only housewives who are liberated, Fujin Koron, April 1972.

Iku Hayashi(f), Housewives are still unliberated, Fujin Koron, May 1972.

Masako Ito(f), Do not feel happy, Housewives, Fujin Koron, May 1972.

Masuko Murakami(f), The problems of housewives' leisure time, Fujin Koron, July 1972.

K. Takeda(f), Again on the libaration of housewives, Fujin Koron, Aug. 1972.